

this is the other side by TolkienGirl

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Summary: In which Steve might have a concussion, Dustin is worried, and Nancy is the only one who knows how to make soup. (Steve & Nancy-centric, h/c for Steve.) (Post Season 2)

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"Two weeks, guys!" It's the third time Dustin's said it, and honestly, repetition doesn't seem to be as persuasive as he'd hoped.

"He's practically a grown-up," Mike says.

"Big difference *that* makes, when you get your face smashed in by a *psychopath*," Dustin argues. "Sorry, Max."

She lifts a shoulder. "No need." From what Dustin understands, things have been a little better for Max, since she...made her point...with Billy, but *better* still isn't great.

They went home the next day. *After*. Nancy drove Steve home. Dustin isn't sure how *that* went. He thinks Steve went to the hospital for a check-up, maybe. But now it's been almost six days, and they can only talk to each other about *everything* (so they do), and Steve is alone at his house.

For two weeks, because Steve told Dustin that. And yeah, maybe Steve *did* go to the hospital but Dustin's been sick enough times to know that sometimes you need people around to make sure you don't get dizzy and whack your head on something, or give you medicine, or in Steve's case, make sure you don't slip into a life-ending coma or something.

"It's like, super close to Will's house," he says. He's winning Max over, he can tell. Max hasn't been in Hawkins long so she's less aware of the social stratification.

"We could just ride over there and *see*," she says.

"Steve Harrington's going to *love* that," Lucas says sarcastically. Then he looks embarrassed, because he basically just contradicted Max. Dustin rolls his eyes. It's easier than thinking about how much that still sucks. "But really, guys? What good does it do for us to all—"

"We should bring him food. Do you think Ms. Byers would let us use her kitchen?"

"Not after they found the demadog," Mike points out, shooting Dustin a *look*. Dustin flushes. *When* will someone appreciate the winding route of his curiosity voyage? The thing *was* dead.

"Ask Nancy," Max says. "Nancy will figure out the food."

They all look at her.

"You know they used to date, right?" Mike asks. He's still a little sharper with Max than the rest of them, but it's getting better. At least, Dustin thinks so. "It's a whole weird thing."

Max shrugs. "I think she still cares about him."

"How can you tell?" Dustin demands. He knows Steve still cares about Nancy, and he totally understands why—Dustin's been kind of keen on Nancy since the fourth grade—but he's not sure if it runs both ways.

"I'm a girl, dumbass. I can *tell*."

They all muse on this for a moment.

"Soup?" Lucas suggests, tentatively. Good, Lucas is coming around.

But no one knows how to make soup.

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In the end, they do go to Nancy. But on one condition, which Dustin demands and then consequently almost blows out of the water.

"It's for Eleven. She has a cold. 'Cause of the whole saving-the-world thing."

"Why doesn't Mrs. Byers—"

"Chief didn't want to ask." Max is good at the convincing look, pale eyebrows high and innocent. "She already does so much..."

"We'll help," Lucas insists, but Nancy rolls her eyes and brushes them aside.

"I'll make some soup, oh my God. It's fine. Least I can do."

And that's when Dustin almost messes up, grinning like an idiot.
"He'll love it."

Nancy stops, stills. It's like she knows. "He?"

"Uh...the Chief. Eleven isn't picky."

"Huh," Nancy says, and one of her perfect eyebrows goes up a little, but she doesn't say anything else.

Dustin heaves a sigh of relief.

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"What do we do if his parents are there?"

Max, always thinking of the things they don't.

"They're *gone*," Dustin reminds her. The way the sun is shining on her hair, with that half-light of a November afternoon, is killing him, but it comes out snappish in his tone. Steve was right about the not-caring thing. Or the not-looking-like-you-care thing. Dustin doesn't know if one really leads to the other.

"He *said* that."

"Why do you think he always had so many parties? His parents are never around."

And it's an indisputable fact that *that* sucks, parties and all.

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They forgot that soup is made in a pot.

"How are we going to—"

"Stupid, we should have made bread—"

"Who the hell knows how to make bread, Dustin?"

Dustin jams the palms of his hands into his eyes, thinking. "We can sort of tow it—"

"Do you need me to, like, drive this over to Hopper's?"

And holy *shit*, Nancy is right behind them.

Everyone panics. And then Max just heaves a sigh, and makes an executive female decision that no one else even gets to weigh in on.

"The soup," she says, "Is for Steve."

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Nancy drives. Dustin goes with her, because he knows the way to Steve's house, and after a hushed conclave and a good many entrusted messages, they all agree that the less people to witness Nancy-visiting-Steve-on-his-possible-deathbed the better.

Dustin keeps clearing his throat the whole ride.

"Are you getting a cold?" Nancy asks, like she isn't white-knuckling the steering wheel. Like this whole thing isn't as awkward as it gets.

"Nope," Dustin manages to answer. "Um, turn here."

He could kick himself. Like Nancy doesn't know how to get to her ex-boyfriend's house.

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Steve's house is really freaking big, and from the looks of it, really freaking empty.

Nancy looks like she's about to be sick, and Dustin feels cold all over. He thought that, hey, yeah, thinks might be awkward, but not like *this*—

She has the pot of soup in her hands, and she's biting her lip, and it's like her feet are frozen to the ground.

"I'll take it in," Dustin says. "I'll just ring the doorbell, you can wait in

the car, it's just that we haven't heard from him and he probably had a concussion and..." His voice trails away.

Nancy says, "Sorry. Um. Sorry, this isn't about—it's just—" Her lips start forming a word, and Dustin wasn't there, Dustin isn't Nancy's best friend, Nancy has only just started even *talking* to Dustin, but he knows that she's thinking about Barb.

Dustin puts a hand over her hand, wrapped around the handles of the pot. The soup seems silly now, but it is what it is. Nancy doesn't flinch away, or tell him he's gross, so he takes that as enough encouragement.

"I'll come with you," he says.

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Dustin was right about the emptiness.

They find the kitchen and Nancy puts the pot on the stove. There's some dishes in the sink. A roll of money on the table, and a note with a phone number on it. It's a fancy kitchen, but it doesn't look like anyone uses it much.

"He's probably upstairs," Dustin says. His voice echoes.

Nancy clears her throat, like *she's* the one getting sick. She goes to the bottom of the stairs, clenches her fists, and calls, "Steve? It's Nancy. I'm coming up."

The Steve Dustin knows, the Steve who saved him—well it's been radio silence for almost a week now. That Steve feels miles away.

He wonders how far away it feels to Nancy.

There's a muffled groan, and a sound like footsteps or movement or something. Nancy takes the steps two at a time. She knows which door is his. Of course. They used to date. Dustin feels his ears getting hot, but he follows her.

Nancy opens the door. Nancy says, "Oh, *Steve*."

She shuts the door.

Dustin figures that Steve will never forgive him if he listens in, so he retreats to the stairs. All of a sudden, he wonders if the soup is enough. Steve was beaten up pretty bad—what if he should have been in the hospital all this time? What if Steve *dies*?

Dustin doesn't remember to pray a lot. He sits on the stairs and keeps mumbling words that don't make a lot of sense together, but that all feel like they're coming from somewhere.

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"It wasn't bad to call you, right?"

Nancy's hands are on the wheel, towards the top, so she's all pointed forward, hands and eyes. Dustin doesn't know if she's upset. Her cheeks are a little flushed.

"No," she says. "I—" She stops. "He's just sleeping a lot. Hopper came by and took him to the hospital—after. So he's OK. He says he's OK. Just...he feels awful."

"I bet," Dustin says. The Party has failed him. They should have been visiting more, they should be bringing more than just soup.

"He's all alone," Nancy says. Her voice sounds weird. She turns her head, then, and looks at Dustin. There are definitely tears in her eyes. He doesn't know if he's ever seen Nancy Wheeler cry. Dustin keeps hearing Steve's voice in his head over and over again, *Nancy's special*, and he wonders if Steve is ever getting better *inside*, or if he'll ever be able to tell. "You won't leave him to himself, right? You and Lucas and Mike and Max..."

"We won't leave him alone," Dustin says, very much on his pride, even though he was just berating himself for being a failure like a minute ago. Steve is a Party member, like it or not. "But..." And he thinks maybe he's about to go too far. "You shouldn't either."

Nancy's mouth twists. Maybe she thinks it's weird too, talking about her ex-boyfriend with one of her brother's nerdy friends. "I don't think I can do much for him," she says. "He told me I...I should go."

"He still *loves* you," Dustin blurts. And yeah, if Steve eats the soup and survives, he's *really* going to kill Dustin.

Nancy says nothing for a long stretch of road. Dustin memorizes every tangle of dead branches, every crack in the pavement. Then Nancy whispers, "I know."

"I'm not in charge of the love stuff," Dustin says. If he were, he thinks he'd tell Nancy to get back together with Steve. But hey, if she loves Jonathan—like Max likes Lucas—well, it's all a mess and Dustin would rather fight off interdimensional monsters any day of the week than sort out these internal twists. "I guess I'm just saying, we all need each other, right? Like, all of us who know. So that means you and Steve still need each other."

There's a lot more silence. Nancy is like Mike that way, it seems. All talk and then all silence and tortured staring.

"He says thanks for the soup," she says, and the smile breaks over her face like sunlight.

Yeah, Dustin sees it. Nancy's special.

And dammit all, Steve Harrington is going to make it through.